

Helpdesk Research Report: Gender Equality in Parliamentary Strengthening and Electoral Support
12.12.08

Query: Please examine the literature on gender equality in parliamentary strengthening and electoral support to produce a summary of the main issues and debates.

Enquirer: AusAID

1. **Overview**
2. **Electoral Systems**
3. **Political Parties**
4. **Media Training**
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1. Overview

The issue of ensuring gender equality through parliamentary strengthening and electoral support is a vast area and it has been difficult to identify and summarise the numerous key issues and debates within the limited time-frame for this query. This is especially as a considerable amount of work has been done in this area recently, and a much broader understanding of the obstacles, challenges and possible strategies has emerged. Many countries around the world have recognised the under-representation of women in politics and started to adopt measures to help women enter politics and national legislatures. The objectives of these measures range from promoting women's political participation in general, to ensuring access to legislative representation and enhancing the influence of women within parliaments.

Some of the key considerations for gender equality and electoral support include:

- The legal framework: This includes a country's constitutional provisions, electoral laws and temporary special measures designed to ensure women's participation within political parties and their representation in parliaments.
- Electoral management bodies: EMBs can play a key role in highlighting gender issues in elections by identifying obstacles that hinder the participation of women, and by conducting voter education programmes aimed at women and men.
- Political parties: Transforming internal party structures so that they favour the advancement of women within the party and their nomination as candidates.
- Voter registration: Encouraging women to register throughout the country, removing obstacles that may prevent them from accessing registration centres, monitoring the percentage of women registrants by obtaining registration statistics disaggregated by sex, etc.
- Civic and voter education: Levels of illiteracy are often extremely high among women. This affects the impact of public information materials and outreach campaigns. Voter education teams should include women; present a message that women of all levels

- of education can understand; and deliver the message at appropriate, accessible venues. In addition, specific education programmes need to be designed and targeted at men.
- The electoral campaign: Providing women with support in establishing local and central political networks; developing a political programme; selecting campaign staff; securing campaign financing; and accessing media.
 - Polling, counting and monitoring/observation: Provisions should be made for women with babies, pregnant women, women who are not permitted to travel long distances or do not have the means to do so, and for women who cannot afford to be away from the elderly, their children or livestock for too long.¹

The second half of this query looks at the participation of women in parliaments. In January 2007, according to the statistics of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the world's average proportion of women members of national-level legislatures stood at only 17.2 per cent. Some of the most common obstacles to the entry of women into parliaments include:

- Lack of political party support;
- Lack of coordination and support networks between women MPs and other public organisations;
- The dominance of male-oriented norms and male-dominated structures which work against women's public participation;
- Insufficient mobilisation of media support;
- Lack of large-scale leadership-oriented training and education for women;
- An electoral system that is not conducive to women's participation; and
- The lack of quota reservations.²

The issue of quotas is considered particularly important. There has, in recent years, been an exponential increase in the number of countries adopting quotas in order to increase the representation of women in politics. It is argued that because of the obstacles that women face in the electoral process, these special measures are needed to promote their presence in parliament. And indeed, quotas are considered one of the most effective mechanisms to ensure that women are able to access to political power. It is apparent that in many instances quotas have contributed to an increase in the number of women in parliament. It is argued that in some cases, such as Rwanda and Afghanistan, they can result in the delegitimisation of the influence of women that benefit. More generally, many commentators caution against viewing quotas in isolation – it is how they interact with other factors in a particular country, such as the type of electoral system, the legal environment, and the nature of women's movements, that is key.

It is often claimed that the election of women to parliament in greater numbers will change the nature of the parliament itself, and that their influence will be seen in changed policy priorities and legislation. However, as several commentators argue, most of the research to date as focussed on explaining the process of women's entry into politics, and not so much on whether and how they can make a difference once they enter parliament. Some of the literature below aims to address this gap.

¹ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support in cooperation with the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, 2007, 'DPKO/DFS-DPA Joint Guidelines on Enhancing the Role of Women in Post-Conflict Electoral Processes', United Nations

² Ballington, J. and Karam, A., 2005, 'Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers', International IDEA

2. Electoral Systems

United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support in cooperation with the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, 2007, 'DPKO/DFS-DPA Joint Guidelines on Enhancing the Role of Women in Post-Conflict Electoral Processes', United Nations

<http://aceproject.org/ero-en/topics/electoral-standards/DPKO-DFS-DPA%20election%20guidelines.pdf>

The objective of these guidelines is to provide advice on measures that could be implemented in future electoral processes in post-conflict environments to increase the participation of women as voters, candidates, and electoral officials and to ensure that electoral processes have an equal impact on women and men. The areas addressed include:

- **The legal framework:** A country's constitution should guarantee the right of all citizens to participate in polls. Constitutions or electoral laws can be amended to create political space for women. This can be done, for instance, by issuing temporary special measures to ensure women's participation within political party structures or provisions to guarantee the representation of women in the parliaments of countries without political parties.
- **Electoral management bodies:** EMBs can play a key role in highlighting gender issues in elections by identifying obstacles that hinder the participation of women, and by conducting voter education programmes aimed at women and men. In addition, women should hold positions at all levels of the EMBs, from commissioners to polling station officials. At the policy level, women can ensure that regulations and procedures contain gender-sensitive provisions and at the field level, they can inspire trust and confidence in women voters.
- **Women's political participation as candidates:** Long-term capacity-building projects, however, can transform internal party structures into more democratic ones that favour the advancement of women within the party and their nomination as a candidate. To this end, synergy among agencies such as the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), UNDP, UNIFEM and other UN country team partners can play an important part in introducing affirmative action measures and in supporting debate within political parties on mentoring women as leaders. Training opportunities should also be created, including in the preparation and delivery of campaign speeches and in communication strategies and techniques. Training and sensitisation of the transitional or constitutional assemblies responsible for drafting constitutional or electoral law is also an important activity
- **Voter registration:** Objectives should include encouraging women to register throughout the country, removing obstacles that may prevent women from accessing registration centres, monitoring the percentage of women registrants by obtaining registration statistics disaggregated by sex, etc.
- **Civic and voter education:** Levels of illiteracy are often extremely high among women. This affects the ability of public information materials and outreach campaigns, for example, to address the needs of women effectively. It is important therefore that voter education teams: include women (if necessary comprising only women); present a message that women of all levels of education and the illiterate can understand; and deliver the message at appropriate, accessible venues. In addition, specific education programmes need to be designed and targeted at men.
- **The electoral campaign:** Measures should include providing women with support in establishing local and central political networks; developing a political programme; selecting campaign staff; securing campaign financing; and accessing media.
- **The challenges and complaints process:** If women candidates or political party officials are involved in a complaint proceeding or in another kind of court case related to the election, independent observers should carefully follow the matter and determine whether the case is handled differently to similar ones involving men.

Other factors requiring appraisal are accessibility to the sites of ECCs, the gender balance among ECC officials, the level of confidentiality at all stages of the procedure (aimed at safeguarding the security of complainants), and provisions for illiterate complainants.

- Polling, counting and monitoring/observation: Provisions should be made for women with babies, pregnant women, women who are not permitted to travel long distances or do not have the means to do so, and for women who cannot afford to be away from the elderly, their children or livestock for too long.

For further UN guidelines on gender and electoral processes in post-conflict contexts, see also:

Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2004, 'Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-conflict Countries', Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Glen Cove, New York, January 19-22

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/meetings/2004/EGMelectoral/FinalReport.PDF>

Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), 2004, 'Women and Elections: Guide to Promoting the Participation of Women in Elections', United Nations, New York

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/TableofContents.htm>

Larsersud, S. and Taphorn, R., 2007, 'Designing for Equality: Best-Fit, Medium-Fit and Non-Favourable Combinations of Electoral Systems and Gender Quotas', International IDEA, Stockholm

http://www.idea.int/publications/designing_for_equality/upload/Idea_Design_low.pdf

This report argues that besides political, socio-economic and psychological reasons that create obstacles for women entering politics, one important variable influencing the likelihood of women being elected to the national legislature is the electoral system used in a country. It provides an overview of the 'fit' of the various electoral systems with different kinds of quota and assesses how increased women's representation can be achieved under different combinations of electoral systems and quotas. It aims to serve as a reference tool for those who work to increase women's representation in politics, and to highlight the variables at play, the choices to be made and the likely implications of these choices for the representation of women. The report concludes with the following key points:

- The country context needs to be taken into account. When designing the 'rules of the game', a holistic view should be taken in order to see the ways in which different elements can act to complement each other and avoid gaps or contradictions. The different combinations of electoral systems and quotas work quite differently and therefore the electoral system and the quota to be used must be considered together instead of separately.
- Importing wholesale solutions directly from the existing literature and/or the experiences of other countries may not be appropriate. Both electoral systems and quotas can be modified and adapted to suit the specific context in which they are implemented.
- When designing electoral institutions, it is highly advisable to include as many stakeholders as possible in the discussion, design and implementation phases in order to reach a broad understanding of the problems at hand and thereby achieve the greatest possible legitimacy for the provisions adopted.
- The use of gender quotas can significantly increase women's participation in politics, but it is important to keep in mind that quotas can often be treated as a ceiling for the nomination of women candidates. For example, a quota stipulating that 30 per cent of

candidates should be women is unlikely to result in a higher percentage being nominated, and thereby in effect sets a ceiling to women's political representation. In order to increase the representation of women, it is therefore important to work on many different fronts at the same time, of which electoral systems and quotas are only two.

Galligan, Y., 2006, 'Bringing Women In: Global Strategies for Gender Parity in Political Representation', University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender and Class

http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=wle_papers

This article discusses some of the strategies used internationally to increase women's political representation. It examines legislative quota provisions and argues that these interact in complex ways with the existing electoral and political systems in which they are embedded. The author also distinguishes between quotas at the point of candidate selection, and reserved parliamentary seats, and highlights concerns about the delegitimisation of women's representative role associated with reserved seats. The article also considers voluntary party quotas as a method of supporting political opportunities and gives some examples of successful practices in this regard.

However, the author argues that for various reasons, quotas should not be considered as the only means of increasing women's political participation. In fact, the optimal conditions for increasing women's political presence occur when political women, feminists within governing institutions and civil society activists, come together to pursue this goal. "Civil society plays a vital role in keeping pressure on the political system for gender parity in representation. Coalition building to press for political parity has yielded particularly positive results – sensitising society to gender equality, creating a climate accepting of gender equality norms, and providing political women with an important source of leverage in pursuit of parity claims. The most effective and enduring strategies stem from a coalition of female politicians, women leaders and feminist activists. While positive-action measures can be effective in the absence of this "velvet triangle", as shown in South-East Asian societies, the participation of all three groups is generally required in order to move political will towards a more gender-equal view of democracy." (p. 336)

Powley, E., 2003, 'Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition', Hunt Alternatives Fund

http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/10_strengthening_governance_the_role_of_women_in_rwanda_s_transition.pdf

This article highlights that following the 2003 parliamentary elections, women held nearly 50 per cent of the seats in Rwanda's parliament, the highest level of female parliamentary representation in the world. This was a result of innovative structures and mechanisms that were designed to include women and open avenues for greater public participation in local and national governance. These include:

- A parallel system of women's councils and women-only elections guaranteeing a women's mandate for all elected bodies
- A triple balloting system guaranteeing the election of women to a percentage of seats at the sector and district levels
- The Ministry of Gender and Women in Development and gender posts within other government and ministerial structures, at all levels

As a result women have been shaping decisions and influencing policy-making. Examples include the inclusion of marginalised groups in decentralised structures; the implementation of national and community-based reconciliation efforts that reach the grassroots; participation in the drafting of the new national constitution; creation of a tripartite partnership among civil society, the executive and legislative bodies; and formation of the first cross-party caucus in parliament which works on issues such as land rights and food security.

The authors make the following recommendations:

- The international community must acknowledge the progress made in Rwanda on women's inclusion, and allocate resources to further these efforts. In particular, the new structures must be funded; members of the women's councils must be salaried; and training should be provided to strengthen women's skills in leadership and governance.
- International donors should draw on the Rwandan structures as models for the inclusion of women in other post-conflict societies.
- The presence, participation and progress of women in governance structures should be considered a key indicator by which the international community measures good governance and democratisation processes.

'Advocacy and National Elections: Women's Political Participation in Honduras', in Gell, F and Hoare, J., 2008, 'Programme Insights: Learning for Action on Women', Oxfam, Oxford

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/gender/downloads/prog_insights_gender8_honduras.pdf

Part of a series of documents that provide learning from programmes that Oxfam GB and its partners have been supporting around the world, this paper discusses Oxfam's advocacy work in Honduras on women's political rights, and women's leadership and empowerment in the political sphere. Beginning with an overview of the constraints that women face if they wish to participate in politics, the paper then goes on to discuss Oxfam's advocacy and campaigning activities during and after the 2005 election period. These include lobbying and advocacy on political reform, campaigning to encourage people to consider voting for female candidates, and promoting women's leadership and political empowerment.

The paper argues that while a legal framework which promotes women's participation in elected government now exists in Honduras, there still remains a gap between women's formal right to participation and the reality on the ground. "Measures to increase the numbers of women elected have succeeded, but so far it is mainly women linked to political, economic, and religious elites who have benefited from this, leading to legislation that threatens to deny women's rights, rather than supporting them. In light of this, Oxfam and its partners have come to recognise that in addition to lobbying to increase the numbers of women elected, and lobbying for more accountable democratic systems, strategies are also required to ensure that women and men reaching power are aware of gender issues, particularly those affecting poorer women, and are prepared to work to uphold women's rights. For this purpose, it is important to continue and intensify work with women who are active in political parties or who are community or civil-society leaders, who may in the future become elected representatives and leaders, to modify their ideas and beliefs related to women's human rights, and stereotypes about gender roles.

In addition, greater attention needs to be paid to enabling poor and indigenous women to hold public positions, to ensure that policy decisions reflect the needs and interests of this group. This should include training in leadership skills and on how the political system works, to boost poorer women's confidence and knowledge, both of which are barriers to their active participation in the political sphere. It is also necessary to advocate at the government level

for the implementation of public policies for gender equity, particularly those related to greater access to and control over resources. While women continue being the poorest, and the ones with the least amount of time, capacity, and experience, they will continue to be marginalised from the country's political life." (pp. 9-10)

3. Quota Systems

Gray, T., 2004, 'Electoral Gender Quotas: Lessons from Argentina and Chile', *Bulletin of Latin America Research*, Volume 22, Issue 1, pp. 52-78

This article is available for purchase from:

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/120781414/abstract>

This comparative case study examines the role of electoral quotas for increasing women's representation in Argentina and Chile. The author finds that national electoral quotas have been most effective for securing women's representation in political institutions when applied within a closed-list, proportional representation system. In fact, the Argentine electoral system and diligent implementation of the national quota law have achieved some of the highest levels of female representation in the world. However, this has not translated into more policy outcomes for gender interests in either country. This could be the result of the lack of an effective strategy for gender interests, or that women are still minority coalitions in both parliaments. Furthermore in Argentina, while women have achieved the 30 per cent quota, the delegation of female Deputies is divided by partisan differences.

In Chile, the lack of strong quota policies and the binomial majoritarian electoral system have proven important obstacles to women's success in electoral politics. There, institutional and ideological barriers have limited quotas to the internal structures of a few political parties.

Ultimately, the different transitions to democratic regimes in Argentina and Chile have shaped the opportunity space for gender issues in politics. Thus, gender quotas can be effective, but the types of electoral and quota systems are important defining conditions and improvements in gender issues are not guaranteed.

Dahlerup, D., 2003, 'Comparative Studies of Electoral Gender Quotas', Paper presented at the International IDEA Workshop on 'The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences', Lima, February 23-24

http://www.quotaproject.org/CS/CS_Dahlerup_25-11-2003.pdf

This article presents the general trends in the adoption of quotas. It identifies two discourses: the incremental track; and the fast track to women's parliamentary representation, and argues that the incremental track – may no longer be a valid model for ways to improve women's representation.

The article highlights the argument that one of the most important factors behind the increasing trend towards adoption of quotas is the influence of a new international discourse supporting active measures to increase women's representation, as, for example, at the UN conference in Beijing in 1995. However, this does not explain why quotas are being introduced in some countries and not others, and why quota systems seem to expand in clusters. Therefore, there should be a focus on the study of the translation of these new international and regional discourses through national actors, e.g. the women's movements.

Another crucial question is how quotas will eventually empower women. The author argues that in quantitative terms, quotas have already proven effective at increasing the number of women in parliaments, provided that the specific rules match the electoral system in question, and provided that sanctions for non-compliance exist and are properly enforced.

The author argues that quotas do not remove all barriers to women in politics. These include double burden of women, and the gender imbalance of campaign financing. Quotas may even contribute to the stigmatisation of women politicians. However they do, when properly implemented, address some of the most crucial barriers to women's equal political representation, such as male succession patterns, women's lack of power in the parties, especially in nomination processes, and invalidate the common argument that the party could not find enough women to stand for election. However, potential drawbacks to this fast track system do exist. When women are given political positions 'from above', they could be seen as tokens and left relatively powerless, unless the initiative is followed up by massive capacity-building and support.

Finally, the author argues: "What is crucial is how elected women use their new political power, what critical acts they perform in order to mobilize the resources of the political systems to improve the situation for themselves and for women in society in general. Feminist research has shown that women in politics do make a difference, but also that women politicians to a large extent adapt to the existing norms of the political institutions. It may be that the incremental track, with its small increase in the number of women from one election to another, increases the mechanisms of adaptation and assimilation, whereas large increases in the number of women in parliament, a 'gender shock', increases the opportunities for women to change the rules and content of politics. Only future research into the results of fast tracks will show whether this hypothesis holds." (p. 42)

GSDRC Query: Haider, H., 2008, 'Helpdesk Research Report: Quotas for Women's Representation in Africa', Governance and Social Development Resource Centre
<http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD515.pdf>

This GSDRC query provides a brief overview and annotated bibliography of resources on the issue of quotas in Africa. It finds that it is generally agreed that Africa has achieved greater success than other regions in increasing the representation of women in decision-making bodies. The adoption and implementation of quota systems in many African countries has been integral to this development. This success with quota systems is attributed to:

- strong and active women's movements, which lobbied for quotas and greater participation of women in politics;
- regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that have adopted gender balanced representation within the organisation; set quota targets for member countries; and actively monitored the progress of these countries in reaching them;
- opportunities in post-conflict and transition societies, which allowed for advances in women's representation.

It is important to note that women's movements have also been important in pushing for more balanced representation in regional bodies; and for lobbying them to adopted quota policies. Women's movements maximised on the openings in transitioning societies as well – pushing for the representation of women in peace negotiations and institutionalising greater women's representation in new constitutions.

4. Political Parties

Ballington, J. and Matland, R.E., 2004, 'Political Parties and Special Measures: Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes', Paper prepared for the

Expert Group Meeting on "Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries", United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), January 19-22, Glen Cove, New York
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/meetings/2004/EGMelectoral/EP8-BallingtonMatland.PDF>

In most legislative systems, political parties are the main vehicle through which candidates are elected to parliament. They have therefore, perhaps the most strategic responsibility in democracy – to prepare and select candidates for election and to support them in positions of leadership and governance. The main argument of this paper is that political parties cannot claim to be democratic unless they are inclusive and representative of the population they represent. Therefore, the candidates that parties send to parliament should include a cross-section of society. However parliaments remain mostly male dominated. This paper focuses on the process of candidate selection by political parties, highlighting the particular obstacles that women face in this process. The electoral system type, the influence of culture, party organisation and rules, the pool of women candidates, and election campaigning can work against women securing a political party nomination. In light of these challenges, special measures that can compensate for these have been highlighted, including providing incentives to political parties to nominate more women through public funding, and through the application of more direct special measures, such as electoral quotas.

The author argues: "It is apparent that in many instances quotas have contributed to an increase in the number of women in parliament. However, it is not the quota in isolation, but how it interacts with the type of electoral system, the nature of women's movement and how the laws have been drafted and enforced. Quotas will not be successful when introduced as a single measure. In the short terms they may provide women with visibility within the party, but alone they do not equate to internal party democracy. They lay the groundwork for the achievement of gender equality within these institutions, but how this leads to democracy with the party is a question of political will and commitment of party leadership." (p. 9)

Basu, A., 2005, 'Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia', United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=DDF5A87BDDD4A620C125706C0048EFB3&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/DDF5A87BDDD4A620C125706C0048EFB3/\\$file/BasuOP5.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=DDF5A87BDDD4A620C125706C0048EFB3&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCF9/(httpAuxPages)/DDF5A87BDDD4A620C125706C0048EFB3/$file/BasuOP5.pdf)

This paper explores the relationships between women and political parties, and those between political parties and social movements that organise women, focusing on South Asia. It includes case studies of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. The paper addresses a range of issues concerning women, parties and movements in South Asia, including:

- What are the major determinants of the success of political parties in recruiting, retaining and promoting women?
- What are the strategies that parties adopt to gain women's support during elections? And at what point, if any, do parties that receive significant support from women feel compelled to represent their interests?
- What is the relationship between women's leadership and women's representation in political parties? What impact have women leaders had on women's participation in party politics during their tenure in office?
- How successful have women's movements been when they have tried to strengthen parties' commitments to gender equality?

The authors conclude that there is a dearth of scholarship on these relationships on the one hand, and their political significance on the other. Even when parties have neglected women's interests, they have benefited from using women as symbols, drawing on women's votes and using women in electioneering. They argue: "The biggest obstacle that confronts any serious attempt to challenge gender inequality through the party system is that parties draw on women's participation as individuals, not as members of a group that has suffered discrimination. Women's participation in party politics further undermines their sense of collective identity [...] The discussion underlines the shared repertoire of ideas that circulates within South Asia. This cross-fertilization began with common histories of colonialism and, to some extent, nationalism. Even today there are many ideas and practices that are common to the four countries. The normative commitment to relegating women, particularly middle-class women, to the private domain of home and family and excluding them from party politics is pervasive throughout South Asia. Political parties have generally accepted these views and functioned as the gatekeepers of male-dominated systems of power. These patterns have generally only been challenged when women's movements are strong enough to pressure parties to represent women and women's interests better. For them to do so generally entails the existence of a democratic context." (p. 33)

5. Media Training

Gender Links, 2005, 'South African Gender, Elections, and Media Training Report', Gender Links, Johannesburg

http://www.genderlinks.org.za/item.php?i_id=64

This report is an account of workshops conducted by Gender Links and the Southern African Media Services Organisation (SAMSO) in seven Southern African countries that held or were expected to hold elections in 2004 and 2005. The countries are: South Africa, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola and Mauritius. Details of what happened in each country are provided under the country chapters.

The following are some of the objectives of the series of workshops:

- Promoting gender awareness and skills of the media by running training courses on gender and democracy for media practitioners
- Measuring the extent to which SADC governments were honouring their commitment to achieving 30 per cent women in decision-making positions in government, and to increase media coverage of this issue
- Helping the media to understand how gender equality is integral to citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression
- Identifying key gender issues in the elections in these countries and to share the findings of the GL study: "Ringing up the Changes: Gender in Southern African Politics"
- Identifying issues of concern by women in politics in their dealings with the media and vice versa
- Building relationships between women in politics and media decision-makers and practitioners
- Empowering women politicians with practical skills to deal effectively with the media
- Assisting the media in thinking through the gender dimensions of their election coverage.

6. Parliamentary Strengthening

Ballington, J. and Karam, A., 2005, 'Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers', International IDEA

http://www.iiav.nl/epublications/2005/Women_in_Parliament.pdf

The main objective of this Handbook is to provide a comprehensive overview of the processes relating to women's participation in parliament, and to highlight some concrete strategies to enhance women's effectiveness in parliamentary structures. It aims to answer the following questions: What are the major obstacles women confront when entering parliament? What are the different ways of overcoming these obstacles and in which structural and political contexts? What are the mechanisms and strategies women can use to influence the parliamentary political process?

Key themes include:

- the effect of socio-economic and cultural biases and overcoming the challenges in winning election to parliaments;
- the central role that political parties and electoral systems play;
- increasing women's access to decision-making bodies through the use of special measures such as quotas; and
- looking beyond the question of numbers to enhancing the effectiveness of women politicians in transforming the institution of parliament and effecting policy changes.

Chapter 5 of the Handbook focuses on how women can make an impact on the political process once inside Parliament. The authors suggest a three-pronged strategy which consists of learning the rules; using the rules to bring about change; and changing the rules. When it comes to changing the rules, women MPs need to consider:

- the establishment of national machinery to support women's causes and to monitor the implementation of policies and recommendations;
- changing the candidate selection rules for their parties, especially with regard to leadership positions;
- the establishment of mechanisms within parliament which would give women MPs priority in areas where they are under-represented or less vocal than their male counterparts—such as giving women MPs the opportunity to speak first, and instituting quotas in different committees in parliament;
- providing special incentives for initiatives outside parliament which sponsor and support women's issues and women's representation (e.g. women's leadership training schools, media programmes on women politicians); and
- expanding legislation to include emerging issues of interest to women.

In addition to the concrete suggestions to enhance impact outlined in this section of the Handbook, further general areas of need have also been highlighted, including:

- general awareness-raising, particularly amongst rural women;
- impact-based research and training for women;
- understanding the critical role of the media in shaping discourse and action;
- constant positive discrimination which would enable women to increase their numbers in the political arena, as well as amend laws (or introduce new ones) to encourage women's participation - such as quotas for women in different areas of public involvement and the allocation of specific funds to promote women's participation;
- concerted and impact-based positive action on the part of governments, women's organisations, and other public and interest-based organisations; and
- constant caucusing and networking between MPs and outside organisations and interest groups working for the enhancement of women's position generally.

Ballington, J., 2008, 'Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva

<http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-e.pdf>

This survey, conducted between 2006 and 2008, was designed to collect insights from both men and women in parliament into what shapes decision making, and to collect concrete examples of how parliamentarians are working to attain gender equality in politics at the national level. Chapter 2 outlines the different factors that affect the entry of women and men into politics. For men, perceived lack of support from the electorate, for example, can discourage their entry into politics, while for women domestic responsibilities are seen as the single most important deterrent. In addition, women face different obstacles to winning a seat in parliament. Overall, prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women, together with a lack of financial resources, are considered to be among the most influential obstacles. Respondents identified the adoption of electoral quotas and the implementation of sensitisation programmes as important mechanisms in addressing these challenges.

Chapter 5 of the report looks at gender sensitivity within parliaments. It shows that without systematic strategies for gender mainstreaming in parliaments, women's progress in parliament has been patchy. More than half the respondents to the survey believe that gender equality is only "occasionally" or "rarely mainstreamed" in parliament. Only one-third of respondents think that gender equality is "regularly mainstreamed". Respondents identify four factors that are most influential in creating a more gender-sensitive parliament. These are:

- the support of the ruling party in parliament;
- the work of parliamentary committees;
- the work of women's parliamentary caucuses, which are cross-party networks of women; and
- the rules that govern the functioning of parliament.

However, more than twice as many women as men believe that parliament is still dominated by men. Only eight per cent of respondents feel that there have been substantial changes in the rules and practices of parliament as a result of the presence of women.

The survey also finds that women remain concentrated in committees that deal with social issues, education, health and family affairs. Women are often absent from the debate on other issues, such as finance and foreign affairs. This lack of women's participation in committees that deal with the economy, finance and the budget means that women have a lesser say in determining financial priorities and shaping national agendas. This concentration also holds at the executive level. Women held 1,022 ministerial portfolios in January 2008, but only six women held a defence portfolio.

Wordsworth, A., 2008, 'A Matter of Interests: Gender and the Politics of Presence in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga', Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul

http://www.areu.org.af/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=&task=doc_download&gid=518

This paper argues that in spite of the sizeable presence of women in Afghanistan's *Wolesi Jirga* (WJ), the representation of women's gender interests remains minimal. The author explores the possible reasons for this, and suggests ways in which these interests might be more substantively raised in the future. The practice of fast-tracking women into the legislature through affirmative action has, in some way, affected their perceived legitimacy in office. Women's gender interests have not been substantively represented in parliament – there are particular obstacles preventing women and men from raising these interests:

- Women's participation in the current context: Women's presence has been somewhat undermined by negative perceptions of the reserved seats system. Further, divisions between women have been starkly emphasised, countering assumptions that they would stand together as a consolidated block.
- The articulation of collective interest: Neither issues-based blocks nor collective political platforms have been strongly consolidated in Afghanistan's political history. The formation of parliamentary groups and issues-based blocks has been highly problematic, and has not resulted in the emergence of potential spaces for the substantive representation of women's gender interests.
- Representation of constituencies: The connection between Members of Parliament (MPs) and their constituents, and their potential to represent constituent interests (and by extension women's gender interests), is generally weak. Practical needs (in the form of service provision) are more highly prioritised, strengthening patronage networks and class divides.
- Executive indifference and intervention: Even when women's gender interests are raised in parliament, they very rarely become legislation. One reason for this is the lack of attention paid by the executive to gender issues. Female representation in the executive is extremely limited, there being only one female minister—the minister for women's affairs. This containment is highly detrimental to the raising of women's gender interests in other fields.
- International assistance: This is often based on assumptions about the needs of female MPs and assistance is given without an acknowledgement of the pre-eminence of patronage in the functioning of the legislature. As such, it creates unrealistic expectations on the part of both MPs and international actors.

The author makes the following suggestions as to how women's gender interests may be more effectively raised within parliament:

- Reserved seats: A reserved seats system should be identified as a temporary measure to compensate for past inequalities, and not a means through which to provide women with an unfair advantage.
- Issues based groups: The *substantive* representation of women's gender interests will require the institutional frameworks of solid issues-based groups or parties whose commitment to the representation of these interests is a key element of their policy platforms. Serious consideration needs to be given to how this could be achieved, given that issues-based groups, in general, have not been successfully established in Afghanistan's political history to date.
- "Downwards" accountability: There should be an increased commitment to "downwards" accountability, on the part of international organisations, towards the recipients of programmes, as opposed to donors. Documents should be produced on a regular basis, intended for MP readership, detailing agencies' immediate plans for training and other forms of assistance.
- Mainstreaming of gender training: Training programmes should be streamlined to incorporate practical and immediately useful skills, such as the development of legislation. As such, gender should be fully integrated into all training sessions, in order to widen the application of a gender-sensitive approach and acknowledge that all parliamentary activities need to be considered in terms of gender equity.
- Harmonisation of legislation on women's rights: There is very little understanding of the various forms of legislation and treaty obligations that exist to promote women's rights. It is suggested that a compilation of these is made and presented to parliament. The forthcoming National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) may well address this and should be seen as a means to consolidate legislation promoting women's gender interests.
- Women in the Executive/Supreme Court: More women should be brought into the Executive and Supreme Court. Further, it will be necessary to ensure that women's

participation at this level is not limited to certain “women’s spaces,” such as MOWA, as there is a danger that women’s contained presence will act instead as a boundary to encase women’s gender concerns within entities, unable to penetrate other areas of executive activity.

Devlin, C. and Elgie, R., 2008, ‘The Effect of Increased Women’s Representation in Parliament: The Case of Rwanda’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Volume 61, Number 2, pp. 237-254

<http://pa.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/61/2/237>

This article aims to contribute to the debate on whether a higher level of women’s representation in parliament leads to a different style of parliamentary politics. The authors highlight that to date, most studies have focused on Western cases, and the results have been mixed. Women do add new dimensions to the policy agenda, but there is little evidence that their increased representation changes policy outputs. The little work that has been conducted outside the Western context confirms the mixed nature of these findings.

In this article, the authors examine the impact of increased women’s representation in the Rwandan parliament from 2003 to 2006, and particularly women’s effect on the culture of parliament; their impact on the policy agenda; and the impact on public policy outputs. Their conclusions include:

- Women considered themselves to have a greater concern with grassroots politics.
- The only change that ‘automatically’ accompanies an increase in female representatives is a change in parliament’s ‘social climate’.
- A change in the working hours or calendar of parliament has not materialised in the Rwandan example, and there has been no change in the lack of childcare facilities in parliament.
- The solidarity of women parliamentarians has resulted in often quite prominent women’s issues being raised more easily and more often. A gender agenda is now also perceived to be ‘guaranteed’ by the presence of more women.
- In the area of policy, a significant impact has not been seen. This may be because many of the most significant gender-related laws were passed before the large increase in women’s parliamentary representation occurred
- “An increase in the number of women in parliament may be unimportant in comparison with a government commitment to develop legislation that promotes women’s rights. On the other hand, the changes that have occurred in the political culture of the Rwandan parliament and the working relationship between its male and female deputies would have been difficult to impose by fiat. All told, the evidence from the interviews suggests that they were the result of a long process of normalisation arising from the increased numbers of women in parliament.”

Viterna, J., Fallon, K. M. and Beckfield, J., 2007, ‘Development, Democracy and Women’s Legislative Representation: Revisiting Existing Explanations of Gender Variations in the World’s Parliaments’, *Women and International Development*, Michigan

<http://www.wid.msu.edu/resources/papers/pdf/WP288.pdf>

This article highlights the debate on whether the level of economic development in a country influences women’s legislative representation. The authors note that previous studies have found that the substantial cross-national variation in women’s legislative representation is not explained by cross-national differences in socioeconomic development. They argue however, that development does matter. While economic development does not have a direct, linear, across-the-board effect on women’s representation, the factors that affect women’s

representation vary significantly depending on a nation's level of economic development. Specifically, they point out that existing explanations of women's legislative representation, while useful for developed nations, work very poorly within the context of developing nations.

The paper calls for new theoretical models that better explain women's political representation within developing nations, and suggests that democracy should be central to future models.

Their analysis suggests four conclusions about the effects of development on women's legislative representation:

1. Economic development in and of itself does not promote gains in women's legislative representation. Rich countries often have worse records of electing women than do poor countries. However, a nation's level of development does matter in that the factors that shape variation in women's political representation in poor nations are significantly different from the factors that shape variation in women's political representation in rich nations.
2. Current models that aim to explain variation in women's legislative representation worldwide provide strikingly accurate explanations for wealthy nations. In fact, it is likely that, because these models are so robust for rich nations, more is not known about the factors promoting female legislators in poor nations: the statistical relationships between the hypothesised causal factors are so strong for rich nations that these relationships maintain their overall statistical significance even when poor nations, which fit the model much less well, are incorporated into the sample.
3. Existing models do a very poor job of identifying the factors that promote women's political representation in less-developed nations.
4. If current models really tell us very little about the factors that promote women's legislative representation in developing nations, then new theoretical models that uncover and examine what these other variables might be are needed. Why do poor nations like Guyana and Mozambique have some of the highest levels of female representation in the world, while other poor nations like Papua New Guinea and Haiti have some of the lowest?

The authors' findings suggest several directions for these new theoretical models:

- Democratic freedoms are significantly associated with increases in women's political representation in developing nations. Democratic quality should be placed at the centre of new theories of women's political representation in poor nations.
- New theories of women's representation in poor nations must also re-examine static definitions of culture or ideology. New measures of gender attitudes will provide an important starting place for future analyses of how culture may affect women's legislative representation differently given different nations' levels of economic development, especially if combined with qualitative analyses of what accounts for the measurable variations in attitudes toward women. However, this data is still limited for many countries.
- Unlike in developed countries, there is limited support for a significant and positive relationship between women's labour force participation and their legislative representation in developing nations.

7. Additional information

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Websites visited

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